REMARKS

Claims 1, 3-10, 12-18, 20-31 and 33-37 are pending in the present application. By this amendment, claims 1, 10, 17 and 31 have been amended; and claims 2, 11, 19 and 32 have been canceled. It is respectfully submitted that no new matter has been added by these amendments.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1-5 and 9-14 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by EP 588,176 to Hongo et al. (hereafter "Hongo"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 1 is directed to instrument panel comprising a thermoplastic base substrate having a first surface and a second surface; at least one tear seam notch pressed into said first surface of said base substrate; at least one consolidated area pressed into said second surface of said base substrate, said at least one consolidated area aligned with said at least one tear seam notch; at least one hinge area comprising an area of low consolidation wherein a thickness of said base substrate at said low consolidation area is greater than a thickness of said base substrate at said at least one consolidation area, said at least one tear seam notch and said at least one hinge area defining at least one airbag door; wherein a width of said at least one consolidated area is equal to or greater than a width of said at least one tear seam notch. Claim 10 is directed to an instrument panel system comprising an instrument panel and an airbag, said air bag positioned adjacent said instrument panel, said instrument panel comprising a thermoplastic base substrate having a first surface and a second surface, said air bag positioned adjacent said second surface of said base substrate; at least one tear seam notch pressed into said first surface of said base substrate; at least one consolidated area pressed into said second surface of said base substrate, said at least one consolidated area aligned with said at least one tear seam notch; at least one hinge area comprising an area of low consolidation wherein a thickness of said base substrate at said low consolidation area is greater than a thickness of said base substrate at said at least one consolidation area, said at least one tear seam notch and said at least one hinge area defining at least one airbag door, said tear seam notch configured to open when said airbag deploys permitting said airbag to deploy through said instrument panel; wherein a width of said at least one consolidated area is equal to or greater than a width of said at least one tear seam notch.

The Office Action states that Hongo teaches a thermoplastic base substrate having a first surface and a second surface; at least one tear seam notch (19) pressed into said first surface of said base substrate; at least one consolidated area (19, 118) pressed into said second surface of said base substrate, said at least one consolidated area aligned with said at least one tear seam notch; at least one hinge area comprising an area of low consolidation wherein a thickness of said base substrate at said low consolidation area is greater than a thickness of said base substrate at said at least one consolidation area, said at least one tear seam notch and said at least one hinge area defining at least one airbag door.

It is respectfully submitted that Hongo fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention. Claims 1 and 10, as amended, state that the width of the at least one consolidated area is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch. As may be seen in Hongo, especially in Figure 2, the width of the consolidated area (the area on "top" in Figure 2) is clearly less than the width of the at least one tear seam notch (element 19 in Figure 2). As such, it is respectfully submitted that Hongo fails to teach Applicants' claimed invention.

In addition, the use of consolidated areas that have a width equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch results in an airbag that is easier to manufacture and safer since it is easier ensure that the tear seam notch is aligned with the thinner areas of the airbag. And, since the consolidated areas that have a width equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch such that the notch is properly aligned, there is less likelihood of the seam failing to completely open which helps to ensure that the airbag deploys properly in the event of discharge. Since these advantages are not suggested by Hongo, it would not have been obvious to modify the design of the Hongo airbag to create consolidated areas that have a width equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch.

For at least the reasons given above, it is respectfully claim1 and claim 10 are allowable over the prior art of record. Since claims 3-5, 9 and 12-14 depend from one of claim 1 or claim 10, it is respectfully submitted that these claims are also allowable.

Claims 17-18 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by US 5,728,342 to Wirt et al. (hereafter "Wirt"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 17 is directed to an instrument panel comprising a thermoplastic base substrate having a first surface and a second surface; an intermediate layer adjacent said first surface of said base substrate, said intermediate layer comprising a resilient material; an outer layer adjacent

said intermediate layer; at least one airbag door defined by at least one tear seam notch pressed into said base substrate and at least one hinge area comprising an area of low consolidation in said base substrate, said at least one airbag door not visible through said outer layer before an airbag deployment causes said at least one airbag door to open and at least one consolidated area pressed into said second surface of said base substrate, said at least one consolidated area aligned with said at least one tear seam notch.

The Office Action states that Wirt teaches an instrument panel comprising a thermoplastic base substrate 46 having a first surface 40 and a second surface 42; an intermediate layer 46 adjacent said first surface of said base substrate, said intermediate layer comprising a resilient material; an outer layer 48 adjacent said intermediate layer; at least one airbag door 20 defined by at least one tear seam notch 28 pressed into said base substrate and at least one hinge area 32 comprising an area of low consolidation in said base substrate, said at least one airbag door not visible through said outer layer before an airbag deployment causes said at least one airbag door to open.

It is respectfully submitted that Wirt fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention. Claim 17, as amended, states that the instrument panel includes at least one consolidated area pressed into said second surface of said base substrate, said at least one consolidated area aligned with said at least one tear seam notch. This feature is not taught or suggested by Wirt and, therefore, it is respectfully submitted that Wirt fails to teach Applicants' claimed invention.

For at least the reasons given above, it is respectfully claim 17 is allowable over the prior art of record. Since claim 18 depends from claim 17, it is respectfully submitted that this claim is also allowable.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 22-25 and 29-30 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Hongo in view of GB 2,263,667 to Karlsson et al. (hereafter "Karlsson"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 22 is directed to a of producing an instrument panel system comprising an instrument panel and an airbag, said method comprising press molding a thermoplastic base substrate having a first surface and a second surface into a predetermined shape of the instrument panel, wherein press molding the base substrate comprises pressing at least one tear seam notch

into the base substrate; pressing at least one consolidated area into the second surface of the base substrate, the at least one consolidated area aligned with the at least one tear seam notch; pressing at least one hinge area into the second surface of the base substrate, each hinge area comprising an area of low consolidation wherein a thickness of the base substrate at the low consolidation area is greater than the thickness of the base substrate at a consolidation area, the at least one tear seam notch and the at least one hinge area defining at least one airbag door.

Hongo has been previously discussed. Karlsson teaches a method of forming airbag covers using compression molding.

It is respectfully submitted that the combination of Hongo and Karlsson fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention. As previously discussed, Hongo fails to teach or suggest an instrument panel having at least one consolidated area that is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch. Karlsson fails to remedy the deficiencies of Hongo since Karlsson teaches a manufacturing method and, as such, does not teach or suggest an instrument panel having at least one consolidated area that is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch. As such, it is respectfully submitted that the combination of Hongo and Karlsson fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention.

For at least the reasons given above, it is respectfully claim 22 is allowable over the prior art of record. Since claims 22-25 and 29-30 depend from one of claim 22, it is respectfully submitted that these claims are also allowable.

Claims 6-8 and 15-16 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Hongo in view of Wirt. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claims 1 and 10 have been discussed previously.

Hongo and Wirt have been discussed previously.

It is respectfully submitted that the combination of Hongo and Wirt fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention. As previously discussed, Hongo fails to teach or suggest an instrument panel having at least one consolidated area that is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch. Wirt fails to remedy the deficiencies of Hongo. Wirt does not teach any consolidated area at all, but rather teaches a hinge portion 32. Since the hinge portion cannot be aligned with the tear seam, else the airbag would not deploy properly, Wirt cannot be said to teach at least one consolidated area that is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch wherein the at least one consolidated area is aligned with the at

least one tear seam notch. As such, it is respectfully submitted that the combination of Hongo and Wirt fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention.

For at least the reasons given above, it is respectfully claim1 and claim 10 are allowable over the prior art of record. Since claims 6-8 and 15-16 depend from one of claim 1 or claim 10, it is respectfully submitted that these claims are also allowable.

Claims 17-21, 26-28 and 31-37 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Hongo in view of Karlsson and Wirt. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claims 17 and 22 have been discussed previously. Claim 31 is directed to a thermoplastic panel comprising at least one hidden airbag door, said panel further comprising a thermoplastic base substrate having a first surface and a second surface; at least one tear seam notch pressed into said base substrate; at least one consolidated area pressed into said second surface of said base substrate, said at least one consolidated area aligned with said at least one tear seam notch; at least one hinge area comprising an area of low consolidation wherein a thickness of said base substrate at said low consolidation area is greater than a thickness of said base substrate at said at least one consolidation area, said at least one tear seam notch and said at least one hinge area defining at least one airbag door, wherein a width of said at least one consolidated area is equal to or greater than a width of said at least one tear seam notch.

Hongo, Karlsson and Wirt have been discussed previously.

It is respectfully submitted that the combination of Hongo, Karlsson and Wirt fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention. As previously discussed, Hongo fails to teach or suggest an instrument panel having at least one consolidated area that is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch. As previously discussed, Karlsson fails to remedy the deficiencies of Hongo since Karlsson teaches a manufacturing method and, as such, does not teach or suggest an instrument panel having at least one consolidated area that is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch. Wirt fails to remedy the deficiencies of Hongo and Karlsson since Wirt does not teach any consolidated area at all, but rather teaches a hinge portion 32. Since the hinge portion cannot be aligned with the tear seam, else the airbag would not deploy properly, Wirt cannot be said to teach at least one consolidated area that is equal to or greater than the width of the at least one tear seam notch wherein the at least one consolidated area is aligned with the at least one tear seam notch. As such, it is respectfully

submitted that the combination of Hongo, Karlsson and Wirt fails to teach or suggest Applicants' claimed invention.

For at least the reasons given above, it is respectfully that claim17, claim 22 and claim 31 are allowable over the prior art of record. Since claims 18, 20-21, 26-28 and 32-37 depend from one of claim 17, claim 22 or claim 31, it is respectfully submitted that these claims are also allowable.

Conclusion

For at least the reasons given above, it is respectfully submitted that the foregoing amendments and remarks fully comply with the Office Action and that the claims herein should now be allowable to Applicants. Accordingly, reconsideration and allowance are requested.

If there are any additional charges with respect to this Amendment or otherwise, please charge them to Deposit Account No. 50-3622.

Respectfully submitted,

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